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ABSTRACT

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WAYS BE FOUND FOR THE RESOURCES OF THE UNIVERSITY TO BE USED IN IMPROVING RELATIONS AMONG THE DIVERGENT AND CONFLICTING GROUPS IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES. THE PRIMARY RESOURCE, EDUCATION, CAN BE USED IN CREATING NEW CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION. IT CAN ALSO BRING TOGETHER ACADEMICIANS, PROFESSIONALS IN HUMAN RELATIONS, CITIZEN LEADERS, AND OTHER CONCERNED PEOPLE. ALTHOUGH COMMUNICATION WILL NOT SOLVE THE PROBLEMS, IT WILL INCREASE THE CAPACITY OF CONFLICTING GROUPS TO FIND COMMON SOLUTIONS. THE MOST SIGNIFICANT, ALTHOUGH THE MOST DIFFICULT, ROLE THE UNIVERSITY CAN PLAY IN THE COMMUNITY IS TO SERVE AS CRITIC AND REDEFINER. (DS)

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University Resources and Human Relations Committees

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I like to think that, though I am primarily an academic, I do not dwell in an ivory tower and also that at least a reasonable number of my colleagues also do not dwell in an ivory tower, at least not all the time. There is some advantage, however, in being in the ivory tower some of the time, in having a place which is sometimes remote from the immediate conflicts and that gives one the opportunity to think about, speculate upon, ruminate about, and to get some perspective on the situation. But if one continues this one may be ruminating and speculating about events that other people have lived through and forgotten.

There needs to be for the University and for its academic people a continuing vital relationship with the rest of the society. One of the reasons that keeps me attached to and indeed quite proud of Michigan State is that it is the kind of university which is indeed dedicated to the proposition that it ought to be related to the rest of society and serve that society, and its own sense of being vital comes from this association. We talk on this campus a great deal about our land grant philosophy and some people think this means we started as farmers, but it is in fact a very significant kind of philosophy concerned with a dedication to public service and a dedication to the democratic creed, to the principle of opportunity through education and, then logically, within every other significant sphere of life in our society. It seems to me therefore that it is quite appropriate indeed, very just and right, that the idea should develop here at Michigan State, and in the Institute for Community

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Development of an Office of Human Relations which will serve to link, hopefully in the most fruitful and meaningful and rewarding way, the University with the community. Certainly, the basic and fundamental idea is consistent with what Michigan State and its land grant philosophy has always stood for: academic inquiry on the one hand, and social practice in the community or society on the other, are to be bridged so that indeed both will profit from their exchange with the other.

I think that the ivory tower stereotype is less and less definitive of the American university and the academic community, for even reluctantly academics, but particularly social scientists, have been inevitably drawn into the larger world. Indeed one of the complaints of students is that their professors are so much involved in the larger society, so much engaged in research, consultation, and flying to Washington that they don't have sufficient time to teach or at least to teach well. And they are then reminded, of course, that they do have an obligation back here and one must find some appropriate balance between the service of education for the young and the service to the society that the academics can perform.

For those of us in Sociology, Psychology, Political Science, and Anthropology, or broadly for social science, it seems that much of our future clearly lies in becoming involved in society. I am one who thinks that the future of social science is simply unavoidably involved in the problems of a changing and complex society, in problems of policy and practice. A new modus vivendi is developing between the social scientist as researcher-generalizer, and the practitioners in all aspects of our society on all kinds of issues who are struggling with problems of practice, and of policy.

I think it is important to recognize the fact that many people have moved from academic life out into positions in the society and then moved back to the academic again. And it's also important to recognize that no university has, nor would it reasonably claim to have, any kind of monopoly upon the relevant kind of knowledge and capacity for developing rational programs that are essential to the solutions of problems in human relations. One of the very vital services that this University and others can perform, is to offer an Office of Human Relations which makes it possible for people from communities of even the most modest size, professionals at varied levels, and the academics and intellectuals, who are committed to a deep concern for these issues, to come together.

The university then is a kind of resource and it does have available to it a set of resources. It is singularly important that ways be found by which these resources can be made more useful. Without any claim for a monopoly of wisdom or knowledge the university, by it's very nature, by what it is designed to be, by what may be it's highest claim, is a repository of knowledge. Here is where there is knowledge about human relations. Here is where there is knowledge about how human beings learn in the various contexts in which learning goes on. Here is where there is knowledge about community structure, about group conflict, about processes of social change, about the relationships of attitudes to behavior. Here is where there is knowledge about the emergence and careers of social movements, about leadership. Here is where there is knowledge about the structure of majority-minority relations in communities in our society. Here is where there is knowledge about social organization, about community politics, about the structure of power, and the processes of community decision-making.

It is one of the appropriate functions of a university as an educational institution to be a place where men of knowledge are gathered and where they teach that knowledge to all that would come there to learn. But the other appropriate function of a university is that it stands at the advanced edge of knowledge. It is a place where there are gathered together men who are concerned not only with maintaining and teaching that heritage of knowledge which is ours, but also advancing knowledge. The university's other major commitment then, is to pursue knowledge, to explore the unknown. Here is where knowledge is sought. Here is where the newest comes to be recognized and stated and declared and argued about, and where varying kinds of bits of information and data are synthesized into some kinds of tentative propositions about the world in which we live. Here too, as a consequence, are the research skills and the research organization by which new knowledge is gained.

Thus, in such an area as human relations, and in the interests of those who are involved in it, there is at a university the research resource, the skills, the organization, the know-how, and therefore the opportunity for research of varying degrees of immediate applicability. For, we must remember that what is relevant research for the social scientist, what will engage his interest and his willingness therefore to perform such studies is research which in some way is significant beyond the immediate situation, and which has some degree of generalized meaning. Here is where there is a problem in understanding on the part of the practitioner, the local people who would be interested in and want specific research and knowledge useful in handling a specific problem, and the social scientist, who finds most rewarding in research

the generalized significance that can be drawn from it. It is possible of course for these two to come together through the intermediary function performed by the Human Relations Commission by promoting the understanding of the social scientist on what local people want as a result of research, and the understanding by local people concerning what the social scientists want as a result of their research.

If the university is a place where knowledge is located and where new knowledge is pursued, it is also a place where education goes on. It is a place where there are gathered together people, experiences, and practices having to do with teaching, training, learning, and educating, through classes, institutes, workshops, seminars. These services are one of the major things for which the university was built, it lives by its capacity to educate. Those concerned with human relations, therefore, have much to gain from what a university can give at one level in the development of human relations skills in communication, the building of new programs and organization patterns, in finding and relating themselves to other kinds of people who are relevant for their concern. This is at the level of tools and skills, yet it is not alone the function of the university.

The university should regard itself as remiss in its responsibilities if its programs are merely those of providing people with packets of tools and skills to take back to their community. The university sees its function as being more than training of this type. It seems to me that what the university has to offer is an educational experience, in the developing of perspectives and understandings. The people ought to go away thinking somewhat differently about their most intense concerns (human relations), than when they arrived. Their very conception of what their own functions are, of what it is that they have to do, should be somewhat modified. And

this brings me, therefore, to what I think is in someways the most significant if at the same time the most difficult function that the university can contribute to the problem of human relations: serving as critic and redefiner.

Human Relations Commissions grew up out of the scare and concern about race relations especially when violently manifested. One must remember the major triggering event was the 1943 race riot in the city of Detroit. Cities did not want such a thing to happen in their location and in Detroit, for example, they didn't want it to happen again. The early commissions were often nothing more than the Mayor's committee of semi-official status regarded as "barometers". They were supposed to know when things were heating up, and they were supposed to be firemen to rush in and douse the little local fire before it spread into a major conflagration. In a sense they were agents for helping keep the peace, and only in time did there come to be the recognition that peace and justice were somehow related. Early Commissions were symbols of community reality, symbolic, but not particularly effective since they were not particularly intended to be.

As time went on and Commissions became more developed there was an emphasis upon their being agencies of education, and there still is that concern. There was an emphasis upon their being providers and creators of better communications. Here I want to draw a line on the one hand between the validity of an educational program (as an educator I would be the last one to be expected to knock it) and give full recognition to the importance of our being able to communicate with one another. When little communication takes place in a community this makes for the utter ineffectiveness of a Human Relations Commission. Human Relations Commissions, like too many

other organizations in American society, have worked under this handicap, namely, the wide-spread American idea that the problems that we face are problems of misunderstanding and ineffective communication. Therefore, through better communication alone can we solve problems. The idea that if people only understood one another everything would be alright, is one of the greatest of American myths and it is as erroneous as it is large. Quite clearly in many cases if people understood one another better their capacity for working toward a problem's common solution is likely to be reduced. The fact that sometimes we do not alway know who our enemy is, may be in the communities' advantage. These are not panaceas. The notion that we can, by a packet of communication skills, place our communities on the high road to the resolution of problems is a myth that no Human Relations Commission in the 1960's can afford to buy.

I do not want to give the impression that communication is not important; obviously if there are no lines of communication, if there is no skill in somehow communicating to, and relating with, all of the diverse segments of the community, then the job cannot be done. All I am trying to say is that the job is more than having such effective skills. These are the means by which one can accomplish something but they are not that accomplishment in and of itself.

What is also important of course, is the fact that for a period of time, modest and moderate though the stance of Human Relations Commissions were, they were often in the forefront of their own community. There was not any bolder voice than the small, modest, but pure voice of the Human Relations Commission. If the Human Relations Commission was, in effect, on the side of the angels, the angels in many communities had no trumpets that could be heard very far. This is no longer the case; most Human

Relations Commissions have long since been outflanked by more militant organizations which have addressed themselves in a louder and more militant voice with stronger demands and this has changed the very context in which Human Relations Commissions function.

We need to have some kind of an historical sense even if we are only talking about the history of 20 years or so, and we need badly a social scientist to write this brief history so that we can see the evolving kind of pattern that has continued on from the middle 40's, through the 50's, and on into the 60's. No one as yet has done that.

As part, this historical sense has been the evolving of a new profession which certainly has its antecedence in such people as those of the Urban League before the War. However, only in the years since, with the growth of the community and municipal agencies, and then state and federal ones, has there been a professional staffing on such a scale as to bring into being professionals with professional functions and a certain kind of professional expertise in this kind of field. The best of these professionals are individuals who in their knowledge and understanding of this stand as partners to those of us within the universities. They are not behind in their knowledge of the literature and of the events, and are constantly testing this in the efforts to build programs: programs that are practically effective in all the significant spheres of employment, housing, and education at the national, state, and community level. We need to be aware of this distinctive development of a profession, both in terms of the advantages which I have just alluded to, and on the other hand in terms of the disadvantages. And this is where I think the university, with its closely allied and sympathetic academics who are not, however, in the same professional role are useful.

What are these disadvantages? One of the clear disadvantages, of course, is that every profession tends, as it organizes as a profession, to congeal its perspective and its point of view to create something of an orthodoxy about its practice. This is crucially important for all those professions that are basically concerned with people and with human relationships. There is danger obviously in the development of orthodoxies rendering a group less flexible because of all the kinds of professional expertise in our society there is none that needs to be more changing, more flexible, than that which deals with the area of human relations. And there is the danger, of course, of organizational prerogative, even degrees of bureaucratization, all besetting the older and well-established professions in our society. People in academic life are as equally guilty of claiming, on the part of their profession, that indeed they do have a monopoly on the wisdom, the knowledge, and the expertise, and this becomes important as they more clearly draw the line between those who qualify professionally and those who do not. The development or movement toward professionalization is, I think, inevitable and also a good thing. At the same time there is a need to guard in the area of human relations against these disadvantages that always grow in the professionalization process itself.

As Human Relations Commissions became outflanked by the more militant organizations it only then became evident how modest were their aims, how little their power, and how scarce the resources they could command. It is in this sense that the relationship to the university can be a useful one in the assistance of Human Relations Commissions (their citizen leaders, and their professional staff) in understanding where they sit, and where they act in the range of human relations activities

carried on and aiding them in developing a perspective on the Commission's functions. This perspective will probably have to be continually redefined, because its appropriate functions will never remain the same from one decade to another and indeed will likely change even in shorter periods than that. Circumstances that have led to the growth of an outflanking militancy is not the end of changes that have been and will be occurring.

Many Human Relations Commissions have felt that some of the functions they thought of as their own have been usurped by the state and federal programs. But they need live with and make a positive resource of the kind of power and capacity that lies with these agencies of broader range. Then too, continual population shifts change the ecological make-up of the community. The problem of human relations has been redefined over the last decade as involved in other kinds of problems and not as a problem that sits by itself. This interrelationship of problems that are most relevant now may clearly change so that five years from now someone may suggest some other set of problems with which human relations seems most closely tied. However, the solutions of one set of problems cannot proceed without the solutions to the other whether now or five years from now.

The university then has the necessary function of being a kind of critic and redefiner. A very capable sociologist by the name of Alvin Gouldner wrote an essay some years ago concerned with the problems of applied sociology. The problem of how to be applied, or whether we should even be applied, has bothered us on the academic side for some time. One of the things that he pointed out was that you can pose different kinds of models of how the sociologist might act in the applied capacity. And one model that we have clearly used a great deal, particularly in the industrial field, has been that of the employer-employee relationship. In this instance we are employed to solve the employer's

problems, or at least to help him solve them. The assumption is then that the employer is the one who says what his problem is and you take it from there. Gouldner said this is an inadequate model, we can't operate with this. Possibly this is one of the things that makes applied research so unpopular with so many social scientists. They do not like that kind of relationship. Using the model of the physician, Gouldner said, you see a physician, tell him something's wrong, the physician examines you and says that this is only a symptom, that's not your problem. In other words, he takes it upon himself, on the basis of your complaints, to tell you what is wrong, to define for you what your problem is and even to suggest the lines of action, though he cannot compel you to do so. This is not to say that the social scientist can offer the same degree of expertise that we think at least our physicians can offer us, it is only to suggest the nature of the role in which we engage is a kind of dialogue whereby the seeker says this is what I'm bothered about or trying to do, and the "expert" may say, but you've got the problem wrong and you really should be doing this. It seems to me that his relationship to you should allow him the intellectual freedom to do just that, to question your perspective and in the exchange, of course, it may be possible that you may convince him that he was wrong and in the process educate him. This brings me to emphasize what I think is very important and that is that <u>communication is not a one-way process</u>.

Therefore going back to my beginning point, the university through its commitment to holding knowledge, discovering new knowledge, and teaching, does not and would never claim to have any kind of a monopoly on all the knowledge. Through the coming together of the people in a community and the people of the campus there is appropriate learning on

both sides. By reaching out and relating itself to its society, the university certainly becomes a great deal more relevant because it has the opportunity to serve the society, and learn from those who are directly involved in the community-change processes. The university can, it seems to me, create a necessary dialogue between citizen leaders, concerned people, the professional practitioners, and the academics. Each of these constituents brings a different kind of an involvement, a different angle of perspective, but it is at the university with its conceptions of academic and intellectual freedom that all of these can enter into an exchange that is mutually beneficial, in which all can learn. Because here, in this context those who come from their various positions within the society are at least one step removed from the kinds of pressures and climates that may be limiting them in their communities. Here the university at its best is open to all ideas, is open to thinking the unthinkable, to examining and considering any perspective and seeing what it bears upon the problem at hand. This is the sense in which the Institute for Community Development and Office of Human Relations can serve as intermediaries, bridges, links, and resource people to bring together local community relations people, the best professionals from across the country, and the academic people. This is its fundamental function, its great resource, for it has the facilities, the experience, the commitment to doing this kind of thing. It has the facilities both human and physical for carrying it out and it is in this way that the university can serve itself and serve the society best by serving you.